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AUTHOR Yang, Mei-Ling
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ABSTRACT

This paper explains the principles involved in tape editing and recording for foreign language teaching and in the assessment of the quality of the finished product. Three major points involved in tape making are discussed: (1) compilation of a listening text (requires familiarity with foreign language learning and teaching, as well as an awareness of the needs of society as a whole); (2) tape editing and recording (requires a clear specification of the aims and purposes of learners, specific learning contents, teaching requirements, and forms; a recognition that a recorded tape is only a part of the whole text; and careful planning and proper arrangement of audiovisual materials); and (3) technical problems of language recordings (technical quality, recording acoustics, language standards, and artistic techniques). Discussions of these points provide some constructive guidelines for the assessment of the quality of a recorded tape. Common terms used in quality assessment are explained and classified as commendatory or derogatory. Because the history of audiotape making in China covers such a short span of time, it is recommended that experiences in this area of technology be summed up frequently in order to promote its further development. (CGD)

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On Principles Of Tape Editing And Recording And Its Quality Assessment

The tape editing and recording meant for teaching with its quality assessment is a complex task, because in the making of a tape, an editor and director has to employ acoustic facilities of various types, analyze and compile materials for recording, and choose appropriate speakers based on the contents. He is also supposed to resort to the principles of pedagogy, psychology and aesthetics to tackle the problems possibly met with. Even after a tape recording is completed, he still feels obliged to consider carefully the cassette packing designs and labels on the tape, trying to make an end-product " a piece of artistic work," which appeals to the users and produces a desirable effect. But the tape editing and recording , just like the production of a film or a TV show, is called " regrettable art". Any slight mishandling through negligence may result in the life-long sorrows of the producer once it is marketed and produces some negative responses and certain bad effect.

It is a general rule that in the application of a recorded tape, some readers are anxious to obtain a certain material and often feel satisfied when they first get it, thinking their problems

Yang Mei-ling. An Hui University, He Fei CHINA

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have been solved. But when they are able to possess the recordings, they will certainly feel something undesirable or inappropriate here and there in the recordings, after repetative uses. It is also to be seen that listeners vary in their demands and tastes. The same listening material and its recording may invite different responses. Therefore, the work on the tape editing and recording together with its quality assessment is very difficult. But it doesn't follow that it can not possibly be done. The tape making involves the following major points: the compilation of a listening text, tape editing and recording, and the uses of recording techniques. Discussions on these points may provide some constructive guide lines for the assessment of a recoded tape.

I. Compilation of a Listening Text:

Just as the relation between a film and a scenario shows that a film often conditions its success on a good scenario, the compilation of a listening text is also essential to a successful production of a recorded tape. Otherwise the end-products will not be well received for the lack of satisfactory contents, however advanced the facilities and techniques.

How, then, can a high-quality listening text be compiled ?

Firstly, the acquaintance with the various syllabuses for

foreign languages learning is required. In the syllabuses, the aims and tasks are stipulated. The range of material choices, the subjects and sequence of material presentation are determined. The basic principles of language teaching, its relevant teaching methodology and the skills required of the students are also laid down. Only by acting on the syllabuses can a listening text be well compiled, satisfying the requirements set and contributing to langage teaching.

The principles by which a listening text is compiled should include not only the principles of comformity between its scientific reliability and ideological contents, and of the combination of theory with practice, but also the principles of direct perceptiveness, elicitation and step-by-step progress.

In addition, it is also advisable to have a knowledge of actual teaching conditions, and decide according to different conditions on the listening materials for teaching activities, because teachers differ a great deal in their language competence and performance. Students also show a great deal of variety as to the knowledge they bring to the class. Thus, it proves extremely difficult for the students to reach the same height with the same materials, only after a few years of study. To make up for this difference, the material compilation should be carried on according to the actual teaching—

conditions by selecting the supplementary materials which have both general and specific characteristics. Meanwhile, efforts should also be made to adapt teaching approaches to different materials, ensure the right level of challenge to the students' intellectual ability and the right speed with which they progress. When the students' initiatives are brought into full play, they can get fully developed in their competence.

Apart from this, the material compilation should not be so limited as only to satisfy those majoring in foreign languages, or service foreign languages learners, or language teaching itself. Attention ought to be paid to what the whole society needs. As well as meeting the needs of colleges and universities, the audio-visual education programme should serve the society as a whole, including adult language teaching and child language teaching.

Two points are necessary to mention here. Firstly, a successful compilation of a listening text has, as its prerequisite, a large number of materials available at hand, the materials which have been picked out after being put to practice and tested more than once both in and out of institutions of high learning. Secondly, in the compilation, the experienced teachers should be closely relied upon and constantly consulted for their advice, but in tape recordings,

the suggestions from the recofding experts ought to be respected, because the teachers know the teaching needs and their students conditions while the tape recordings are the processes of acoustics creation by the recording experts.

II. Tape Editing and recording:

Beyond the material compilation, what claims attention is the tape editing. How to edit a tape after a listening text is an important job to do.

A recorded tape is an inseparable part of a whole listening text. Its application in teaching is also a component of the entire teaching activities. A listening material is anything but a result of having what is written recorded on a tape. Into account should also be taken what parts of a listening text are needed for tape-recordings and what forms of presentation adopted. An appropriate solution to this problem involves a consideration of the differences between tapes and written words on the one hand and sound and pictures on the other. An audio tape is characterized by being quick in its transmission of information, various in its uses, portable thus convenient and easy to handle. It is audio, not visual. The information can not be held back. How to get best out of its advantageous characteristics in language teaching is what a text compiler and a tape editor are

supposed to consider. In addition, types of recording materials may be divided into series type, demonstration type, presentation type, question-and-answer type, contrast type, training type, blank-filling type, etc. The differences in types require different approaches to the recordings and different standards. The editing of different types of tapes demands different pronunciations and intonations, rhythms, pauses and repetitions. In spite of the differences, there are some principles they all have to conform with:

Firstly, there should be a clear specification of aims and purpose.

The clear specification of aims and purpose here refers to the specification of learners, specific learning contents, teaching requirements and forms. Different requirements arise from different learners. They include children, youngsters, adults, and those learning through self-study, in-service training and from a coach. The teaching contents cover those meant for intensive reading, extensive reading, training of listening and speaking skills and development of ability for intellectual thinking, etc. As far as teaching forms are concerned, they involve explanation, test, questions and answers, and translation. Since there is such a variety of learners, contents, requirements and forms, it is necessary to specify whom

the texts are meant for and what contents and requirements are. A clearly set aims can make it possible for tape editors and directors to produce high quality recorded tapes. Take, for example, the texts for transmissions over the radio, they are in series, with no blackboard writing and pictures. They are subject to the strict time control. Listeners range from the youth to adults, who are conscientious in their study. Nevertheless, in the editing work, it is necessary to arrange and present the texts methodically and to speak concisely, slowly and clearly. Since the blackboard writing often gives way to speaking, it is of necessity to speak sometimes slowly and sometimes quickly and often repeat the text or the key points explained before. In the choice of speakers, both male and female are necessary. The editing of this type of material is different from that of listening materials for training and tests. From what has been mentioned above. it can be easily seen that there should be a clear aim and purpose.

Secondly, prominence should be given to the important points:

A recorded tape is only a part of the whole text. In the entire teaching activities, a tape can only play a partial role. As a result, the whole teaching procedures should not simply be filled up by playing tapes. In the tape editing and recordings, a study of the characteristics of listening texts and tapes will help bring out

their advantages and best results in education.

Thirdly, there should be an arrangement of materials:

Nowadays, the texts with audio-visual aids are advocated. In the design of the texts, taperecordings, projections, slide shows and videocordings may serve as auxiliary aids to teaching. As every type of machine has its own specialties, careful plan and proper arrangement seems to be much desired in order to gain the best teaching results. Here it might as well be pointed out that the arrangement should rest on the text contents and requirements. It is not desirable to seek audio-visual aids only for the sake of having them for show.

III. Lastly, the technical problems of language recordings will be dealt with, which involves technical quality, recording acoustics, language standard and artistic technique.

The assessment of technical quality refers to the measurement of play-back electric level, the electric level difference between the two channels and dynamic range. Through hearing, the sound distortion, noise electric level and noise interference may be assessed.

Tape Recording Electric Level

The recording electric level is indicated by volume electric

level indicator. If the overload level value is set at "o" , then in the recordings or tape playing, there will be no full electric level. Hence a recording expert should set all the volume electric level within the dynamic range of a recorder, raising the volume of whispers and reducing the volume of loud voices. This done, what has been recorded will sound natural and agreeable to the ear.

Dynamic range:

Governed by the contents and reading techniques, a piece of recording is often characterized by a rise and fall in the voices. The electric level indicator will indicate an electric level difference between maximum and minimum intensity of the voices. For everyday language recording, 60 decibels will be enough, while for music recording, 70 up to I00 decibels may be preferable.

Distortions

In the tape recording, the distortion caused by the characteristic wave of the original sound wave affected by other waves will result in the partial, even total loss of the characteristics of the original sound waves. Sometimes, distortions are allowed to exist intentionally. Those acceptable to the ear will be passable, otherwise they will be regarded as serious distortions. What distortion is referred to here is volume distortion. In addition, atten-

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tion should also be given to frequency distortion, harmonic distortion, transient distortion, etc.

Technical Interference:

The noise is determined by tape quality. Therefore, it is essential to choose high-quality recording tapes, instead of poor quality ones which may affects recording quality, namely: low-frequency hums, high-frequency noise and noises from automatic volume control system.

Noise Interference:

Noise interference includes noises in and out of recording rooms, noises produced by recording facilities and noises in the outside world. All these noises should be avoided.

2. The quality may be assessed by the analysis of language quality. It concerns t e problem of language standardization. The language used in t.e recordings should be up to standard.

As a foreign language tape, the use of anguage should be standard, for example, standard British English, standard American English and standard Russian. It does not follow that in a tape, British English should always be read by the British, while American English by Americans. A Chinese can also record English language tapes, so long as he or she is standard in pronunciation and not

affected by his or her native tongues. Besides having a standard pronunciation, a good command of various intonations are also preferable.

In addition, an approriate control should also be exercised over the speech speed. A speaker is well advised to consider, first, the purpose of tape-making and its intended listeners, then understand how difficult a recorded material is and how well the intended listeners can master the foreign languages, and finally decide on the speech speed. The change of speed is not supposed to affect intonations. This point must be emphasized if a foreigner is invited for recordings.

3. The artistic treatment:

There are many artistic techniques. There are also many problems to handle. Here only the tape dubbing in background music is dwelt upon.

Generally, some pieces of music are added in the beginning, or in the middle or at the end of an audio tape. The music is by no means used in this way to make up a good hour of contents. It has its certain roles and significance.

Everyone, from the young to the old, develops a certain kind of taste and need for music. A piece of artistically appealing musical

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work often arouses the deepest emotions. An educationist in Russia once said: when a student is listening to music, the right hemisphere of his brain is fully activated to feel the music, while the left hemisphere remains inactive. As a result, the text recordings can keep coming unconsciously into his brain without being interrupted by the music. Then when he comes to the text learning, the left hemisphere also becomes active. When the student uses his newly-learnt language elements to play games or carry on conversations, both sides of his brain become fully activated. Therefore, from the viewpoint of psychology and pedagogy, the use of music is of much value and significance. Specifically speaking, in the use of tapes, music can not only play a role in teaching organization, helping to locate the contents of the texts, easing the tension of mind and setting off the plots of an article, but also stand for the publishing units or serve as a symbol of a producer.

In the selection of music, it should not be assumed that the use of a famous piece of music can well satisfy the above-mentioned purposes. Music can only be decided on according to what has been recorded. The advantage should be taken of music rhythm and melody to create artistic images which appeal deeply to the listeners.

4. Acoustics:

It is generally acknowledged both theoretically and practically that there will never be an absolutely universal standard as to sound beauty. The differences in the accomplishments in arts, aesthetics and acoustics and the difference in the training of audio perception and in the formation of aesthetic standards lead to the differences in the aesthetic perception and judgment of the acoustics. Those well-trained and highly-accomplished will prove sensitive to the sound perception and appreciate the acoustic beauty better, whereas those poorly trained will prove dull of the perception and have a shallow understanding of the beauty. Additionally, acoustics appreciation also bears some relation to acoustics customs of different nationalities and regions, life experiences and the social contact.

In the different acoustics judgments and different likes, there still exists something in common which can embody the acoustics customs and ideals, if it arouses the desire for the beauty of real life. The acoustics is mainly reflected in tone, timbre and sound intensity.

In the assessment, a common technical term is necessitated for the sake of convenience. The terms for the assessment may be classified into commentory ones and derogatory ones.

Under the commendatory may be grouped such terms as well-

matched, pure, rich, well-balanced and even, lively, authentic, harmonic, suggestive of the environment, lovely, coherent, lucid and agreeable to the ear, touching, full of vitality, etc.

The contrastive terms in the assessment include wide vs. narrow, loud vs. light, thick vs. thin, soft vs. hard, emotional vs. dry, gentle vs. gruff, warm vs. cold, clear vs. muddy, etc.

The assessment terms with similar connotations but slight differences in their shades of meaning involve such words as muffled, resonant, drowning, uncertain, unsteady, shaky, trembling, jumping, crisp, indistinct, hoarse, grindingly loud, stiff, etc.

Each assessment term has its own particular connotation. When used, instead of standing dependen to of each other, the terms are related. For example, when it comes to the positive assessment of the sound, it is often said to have wide acoustic frequency band, wide dynamic range, good linearity, little distortion, even distribution of treble and bass and proper work of intermediate and low frequencies.

In addition, the sound is rich and agreeable to the ear. When it comes to the derogatory comment of the narrowness of the sound, it refers to the lack of bass, treble and richness, frequency band not wide enough, with too much bass and the lack of different levels in treble range.

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In the sound quality assessment, the volume should be appropriate, otherwise, it can not reveal the real quality of the tape recordings. If the volume is too low, it will create an impression that it is not rich and loud enough, narrow in its frequency ranges, and lacking bass, which sounds as if the voice is muffled. But if the volume is too high, it is likely to create a false impression by drowning the noise and concealing its deficiencies, and sounds disagreeable to the ear. Only by the appropriate control of volume levels can distinctly be felt the loudness, the frequency band width, richness of tone color and its force, and can the sound quality be assessed.

The work on the audio tape making has developped fast recently in our country, but its history of development is not long. Therefore, it is necessary to sum up frequently the experiences in this respect to promote further development.